CHO • PETRAITES • SMITH • MRVA

RED Light

AWA

AWA PRESENTS

RED Light

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Screens, screens, screens.

And more screens.

I'm surrounded by grinning faces all wishing me a happy birthday.

Yet I couldn't feel more alone.

LACY, DON'T BE RUDE. SAY THANK YOU.

ALL OF THESE PEOPLE CAME OUT JUST FOR YOU. THEY'RE ALL SO EXCITED TO SEE YOU.

...T-THANK YOU...

GOOD GIRL.

This is my home.

A 12x14 cube in the city's most popular brothel. It's state of the art. High tech. And caters to any kink, fetish, and desire you can think up. It's a place where dreams come true...

...for the client...

And this is my master.

Mister offers a broad menu of services at different price points to his clients:

Cam girl services...

Sex in virtual reality using top-of-the-line technology to make it as realistic as possible.

YOU LIKE THAT? TELL ME HOW MUCH YOU LIKE IT.

Even in-person visits for his VIP clientele.

Life in this brothel isn't too bad...

So long as you follow the rules...

The number one rule?

Don't even think of trying to escape.

Mister wouldn't like that.

And above all, you want to stay on Mister's good side.

FSSSSSH

Otherwise...he can make your life uncomfortable... painful...and nearly completely unbearable...

MMMM! YES AHAAAHHH

OOOOH! YES YES

NO NO NO

UNH UNH UGH

In my seven years here...only one girl has ever attempted to run away. It didn't take long for the retrievers to bring her back. After all, retrievers are law enforcement who specialized in returning escaped merchandise.

When she was back under Mister's thumb, he made all of us watch what he did.

None of us A.I. ever tried again. The law wasn't on our side and the consequences of failure were too large.

Besides, after that incident, Mister had Kill-Switches installed in each and every one of us. And we lived with the knowledge that with a flick of a wrist...

...he could terminate us at any time.

I spend all my birthdays now attending to Mister's VIP clients.

It's not too bad. Depending on who it is...it can even be enjoyable.

But whether it is or it isn't...you want to put on a good performance.

For all those watching from afar...through the inescapable lens of the drones constantly circling you.

For the quality assurance techs making sure you're not...defective.

For Mister...

Don't get me wrong, I love my birthday.

Birthdays mean presents.

Danson is one of my most frequent customers.

IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL.

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE THE SWISS APPLES?

ALPS. IT'S THE SWISS ALPS. I THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE IT.

HOPE IT MAKES UP FOR--

OH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT. BENSON WILL FIX IT IN A SNAP.

Danson comes to this A.I. brothel because he can be as rough as he wants. The mechanic will easily fix any damage. A broken leg...a dislocated shoulder...all of it is easily mended with the turn of a screw.

I can't hold it against him, though. I can tell...his kink...his job as a retriever... is all an attempt to gain back power.

His father was a drunk. And a mean one at that. The kind of man who made himself feel big by making others small.

WHERE'S YOUR SON? HE DESERVES A GOOD WHIPPING.

Anyone raised by a father like that would turn out a little fucked up.

YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED IN THE NECKLACE?

IT'S GORGEOUS, BUT THIS... ***THIS*** IS...

MESMERIZING. I COULD LOOK AT IT ALL DAY.

THANK YOU, DANSON.

ANOTHER DISLOCATED SHOULDER, LACY? HE NEEDS TO BE MORE CAREFUL.

This is Benson. He's been my mechanic my entire life. And also my only friend.

I like him because unlike all the others...

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT. HE DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT.

I AM SORRY TO INCONVENIENCE YOU ALL THE TIME.

...his touch is gentle.

IT'S NOT AN INCONVENIENCE AND IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. I JUST WISH HE MINDED YOUR PAIN RECEPTORS MORE.

FZZZZ

IT DOESN'T HURT TOO BAD.

YOU SHOULD BE GOOD TO GO NOW, BUT LET ME RUN SOME DIAGNOSTICS.

FLEXIBILITY?

STRENGTH?

SEE? GOOD AS NEW. NO HARM NO FOUL.

EXCEPT FOR MY NEW WRENCH.

OOPS.

KRUNCH

HOW WAS YOUR BIRTHDAY OTHERWISE? GET ANYTHING GOOD?
THE USUAL.
LINGERIE. VIBRATORS. HANDCUFFS.
SO YOUR CUSTOMERS WERE GIVING GIFTS TO THEMSELVES.
MOSTLY. BUT LOOK.
IT'S CALLED A SLOW GLOBE.
I THINK YOU MEAN ***SNOW*** GLOBE.
ISN'T IT SO PRETTY?
GOT YOU SOMETHING, TOO. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'LL LIKE IT AS MUCH AS THAT SOCIOPATH'S SNOW GLOBE, BUT...
YOU WANTED TO LEARN HOW TO READ, RIGHT?
The Little Mermaid
BENSON...
I LOVE IT. I LOVE IT. I ***LOVE*** IT.
YOU KNOW ME SO WELL.
LET ME KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING ELSE. I CAN'T DO MUCH, BESIDES REPAIRS...
...BUT I CAN TRY.

KNOK
KNOK
KNOK

TIME TO WRAP IT UP.

I STILL NEED A MOMENT TO FINISH THE REPAIRS.

MISTER NEEDS IT. DON'T WANT TO KEEP HIM WAITING.

YOUR WEEKLY STANDING DATE?

I DON'T MIND IT.

THAT'S WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY.

DON'T WORRY TOO MUCH. I'LL BE FINE.

I PROMISE.

BESIDES, IT'S THE ONLY TIME I'M LET OUT OF MY ROOM.

KNOK KNOK

COME IN.

I'VE PREPARED ALL OF YOUR FAVORITES.

THANK YOU, MISTER.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY...

MARY.

Mary is not my name...

It's the name of Mister's dead wife.

But he insists on calling me that during our weekly dinners.

HERE, LET ME GET THAT FOR YOU.

I think it's his way of keeping her alive.

When I think about it that way, it breaks my heart.

He must really miss her.

His touch is like Benson's.

Gentle. Soft. Like he would never want to hurt me.

I was grateful for these weekly visits because...

...it meant I got to see the outside world.

And it was breathtaking.

Mister always fell asleep with the TV on. He said he needed the white noise.

WITH THE GLOBAL BAN ON CLONING, WE'VE SEEN UNHEARD OF ADVANCES IN THE WORLD OF A.I. TAKING ITS PLACE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON MECHANICAL ORGANS.

IN OTHER NEWS, THE FBI HAS RECENTLY BROKEN UP A HUGE CHILD-TRAFFICKING RING WITH DOZENS OF MAJOR PLAYERS ARRESTED.

But I never slept. Not even a wink. I wanted to savor the moments here as much as possible.

I wanted to savor the view as much as possible.

...MARY...?

COME BACK TO BED. I NEED YOU.

I'M RIGHT HERE.

I LOVE YOU.

I was the only A.I. who was ever allowed to stay the night.

Because I was designed exactly for this purpose...

LACY?

YES, SIR?

CALL ME MISTER.

The first time I opened my eyes... life came rushing at me all at once. The sights. The sounds. The thoughts. The feelings. It was all so much.

All around me were A.I. in various stages of assembly. Some nearly completed. Others still merely parts yet to be put together.

But all of it...all of us...belonged to Mister.

He wouldn't dare have it any other way. We were all his toys. To do with what he wanted under his watchful eye.

YOU'RE SPECIAL, YOU KNOW THAT?

WHY AM I SPECIAL, MISTER?

FUNNY GIRL. YOU'RE THE FIRST A.I. PROGRAMMED WITH ***EMPATHY.***

REAL EMPATHY.

YOU SEE BEYOND THE FACADE.

DIRECTLY INTO THE SOUL.

YOU SEE THE GOODNESS THAT RESIDES IN EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD, NO MATTER HOW DEEP IT'S BURIED.

I don't understand exactly how it works. But Benson tried to explain it to me once.

YOU HAVE THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL ALGORITHM.

YOUR EYES ARE EQUIPPED TO NOTICE THE SMALLEST DETAILS. HOW LONG AN INDIVIDUAL GAZES AT SOMETHING AND AT WHAT. YOUR SENSORS TRACK SUBTLE SHIFTS IN MOOD. YOUR SOFTWARE RECOGNIZES PATTERNS AND YOU BUILD A PROFILE ON EACH AND EVERY INDIVIDUAL YOU INTERACT WITH.

NOT TO MENTION, YOUR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS ***SELF-LEARNING***, IMPROVING WITH EACH CLIENT THAT WALKS THROUGH YOUR DOOR.

I have never understood any of it. I just do it. I just see into people, feel their pain as if it were my own.

Loneliness, sadness, hurt--I just know what it feels like and recognize it in each individual I meet.

I can hear it in their voice as they tell me their life story. I can see it in their eyes.

That's what I see when I find <u>Natalie.</u>

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME. HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO NA--

--TALIE--

WHO ARE *YOU...?*

I'M LACY.

AND WHO...ARE... *YOU?*

THE NAME'S NATALIE.

IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY?

WHAT'S IT TO YOU?

IT'S MY BIRTHDAY, TOO.

REALLY?

REALLY.

HOW OLD ARE YOU TURNING?

ELEVEN.

YOU'RE CELEBRATING BY YOURSELF?

I DON'T HAVE ANYONE TO CELEBRATE WITH.

I HAVE SOME LEFTOVER *CAKE.* WANT SOME?

WHAT KIND OF CAKE IS IT?

FUNFETTI.

THAT'S MY *FAVORITE!*

ALL THE CANDLES HAVE ALREADY BEEN SNUFFED OUT, BUT WE CAN PRETEND.

IS THIS REALLY OKAY? YOU DON'T MIND SHARING?

NOT AT ALL. OF COURSE IT'S OKAY

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU. HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU. HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO NATALIE.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, NATALIE? YOU DON'T WORK HERE...RIGHT?

OH GOD NO.

MISTER BROUGHT ME HERE SO I CAN BE CLOSE TO HIM.

YOU KNOW MISTER?

THAT STUFFY OLD MAN...? UNFORTUNATELY, YES.

THIS IS NO PLACE FOR A YOUNG GIRL, COULDN'T HE HAVE--

MISTER DOESN'T LEAVE THIS COMPOUND. HE'S...WHAT DO YOU CALL IT...A SHUT-IN? AGORAPHOBIC?

I SEE. SO HE DOESN'T LEAVE THE PREMISES EITHER.

I had heard Mister's wife died in an accident. It was just a rumor but I wonder if his fear of the outside world started then...?

WHAT'S IT LIKE? THE OUTSIDE WORLD?

BEATS ME.

I'VE NEVER LEFT EITHER.

I GUESS EVEN CHILD MODELS OF A.I. HAVE TO OBEY MISTER'S RULES--

NEVER?

NEVER. CAN I HAVE ANOTHER SLICE OF CAKE?

SURE. EAT AS MUCH AS YOU WANT.

OUCH!

YOU'RE... *HUMAN...?*

LAST I CHECKED.

YOU'RE HUMAN--A CHILD--AND YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THE OUTSIDE WORLD?

THAT'S WHAT I JUST SAID, DIDN'T I?

BUT WHAT ARE YOU DOING ***HERE?***

I DON'T KNOW BUT...ONE DAY... I'LL GET OUT OF HERE.

ONE DAY...I'LL ***ESCAPE.***

LACY--

IT'S PAST YOUR BEDTIME. PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR ROOM.

IMMEDIATELY.

IT WAS NICE TO MEET YOU.

SEE YOU AROUND?

COME SEE ME ANY TIME. I'M THE THIRD DOOR ON THE LEFT.

Renowned psychologist Martin Seligman ran a famous experiment hundreds of years ago.

He leashed dogs to metal plates and...

...sent an electric current to shock them.

Over and over and over.

He found that even once they were freed from their restraints...

...they had come to believe they were unable to control or change the situation.

Even when opportunities for escape or change became available, they didn't even try.

He coined the term "learned helplessness."

Meeting Natalie has sparked something in me.

I'm done being helpless.

I am going to escape this hell, see the outside, find freedom.

AND I'M TAKING YOU WITH ME...NATALIE...

THANKS FOR COMING BACK, MR. PETERS. ALWAYS BRINGS A SMILE TO MY FACE.

For the next few days, things proceed as normal. I work as if nothing has changed; I talk as if nothing has changed; I act as if everything is the same as it always has been.

But, internally, it couldn't be further from the truth.

For the first time, I am thinking past the grind, past tomorrow.

For the first time, I have a drive... a mission.

And for the first time, I feel a new emotion...

Hope.

And the reason...?

A little girl named Natalie.

I MISSED YOU, TOO.

I'm going to save her. I'm going to get the two of us out of this hellhole.

But I have to be smart about this.

HEY, YOU EVER GONNA SWING BY IN PERSON? FOR THE ***FULL EXPERIENCE*** I MEAN.

MAYBE. IF I CAN SWING IT. VISITS LIKE THAT ARE EXPENSIVE.

After all, this compound was built so that no one could escape...A.I. or human.

I THINK I'M WORTH IT.

YOU LIVE NEARBY, RIGHT?

I have a rough plan for our escape in mind. But there are so many variables to consider...

One: the kill switch sitting pretty on the nape of my neck. Ready to kill with the push of a button.

(But I've got an inkling about what to do about that.)

Two: The surveillance drones, watching my every move.

(Got some ideas for that, too)

After all, my customers are a treasure trove of information.

YOU LIVE IN THE CITY OF AUTOMATION, RIGHT? TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT...

And three...I have absolutely no idea how the outside world works.

(But I'm already working on that. Right now, in fact.)

You'd be surprised how far acting dumb...

WOW. SO CHECKPOINTS ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE CITY?

...and asking a few questions...

...can take you.

SO HOW FAR IS THE CLOSEST TRAIN STATION OUT OF THE CITY?

After all, men love man-splaining.

THE CITY OF AUTOMATION IS THAT BIG, HUH?

But my top priority is figuring out a way to get out of here.

(And I know just who to ask.)

(A man named Mars.)

Most of the time, Mars just wants to talk. To be heard.

Be held.

LACY. LACY. LACY.

Mostly, he just wants someone to tell him--

EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY. I PROMISE.

CAN WE JUST STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER?

Believe it or not...this sensitive soul is actually one of the top arms dealers in the City of Automation.

And you don't get to the top of an industry like the weapons trade without getting your hands dirty.

Outside my room, he's a formidable man. But in here? It's easy to read Mars. The corners of his mouth turn upwards in a sneer when he talks about his job. His eyes squint, like he's holding back tears, when he's talking about his life. He gives a little exhale of relief every time he walks through my door. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that he has very few people he can truly be himself around.

EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE OKAY...

There's no one he can confess his sins to...

That's why he comes to visit me.

SORRY, MR. MARS...BUT YOUR TIME IS UP.

ALREADY?

AFRAID SO. THE SECURITY GUARDS WILL BE BY IF YOU DON'T LEAVE SOON. THEY SEE EVERYTHING.

ANYTHING WE CAN *DO* ABOUT IT...?

I CAN ASK ADAM--I MEAN...I GUESS YOU KNOW HIM AS *MISTER*... I I SPEND ENOUGH MONEY HERE TO AT LEAST ASK FOR THAT.

THINK HE'D GO FOR IT?

ARE THOSE SURVEILLANCE DRONES ON ALL THE TIME? EVEN WHEN WE'RE FUCKING?

I THINK SO. I'M ACTUALLY NOT TOO SURE HOW IT ALL WORKS.

I CAN'T GET AN OUNCE OF PRIVACY, EVEN IN HERE. THIS MUST BE SOME SORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION.

DOUBT IT. AS FAR AS CONTROL FREAKS GO...ADAM TOPS THE LIST.

HANG IN THERE FOR JUST A SEC MORE, LACY. THE PROGRAM UPDATE IS NEARLY DOWNLOADED. SORRY, THE BLUETOOTH CONNECTION IS LAGGING A BIT.

AND... THERE WE GO.

BEEP

PROGRAM UPDATED.

"BLUETOOTH." IS THAT THE SAME THING RELAYING FOOTAGE FROM--?

THE *DRONES?* BINGO. I COULD GO INTO THE GEEKY TECHS AND SPECS, BUT MOST GIRLS DON'T WANT TO HEAR THE--

I WANT TO HEAR.

TELL ME *ALL* ABOUT IT.

I LEARNED A COOL TRICK WITH THE CAMERAS SO WE CAN GET SOME PRIVACY.

WANT TO HEAR?

A few days later, Mars returns as usual for his weekly visit.

It's time for me to see if my calculations are correct, if my plan will work, if Natalie and I have a shot at getting out of here.

SURE, BUT CAN'T THEY--?

DON'T WORRY. THEY CAN'T SEE ***OR*** HEAR US...

"...WITH MY INTERNAL BLUETOOTH, I'M LOOPING THE VIDEO FOOTAGE IN REAL TIME."

WHAT'S GOIN' ON? WHY ALL THE SECRECY?

I NEED YOUR HELP.

Mars once asked Mister if he could buy me. Permanently.

Mister said no. <u>Emphatically.</u>

Their conversation did not end well.

I NEED YOU TO BREAK ME OUT OF HERE.

My algorithms tell me there is a 92 percent chance that Mars's feelings about me haven't changed.

But there was still that eight percent...

WE'LL MAKE IT LOOK LIKE A ROBBERY.

YOUR TYPICAL SMASH AND GRAB, YOU KNOW?

THANK YOU, MR. MARS--

JUST MARS. NO NEED TO BE SO FORMAL.

And with that...I was one step closer to achieving my goal.

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME. MY MEN WILL COME FOR YOU NEXT FRIDAY NIGHT.

LIGHT READING...?

I'VE BEEN LEARNING MY ABC'S.

NEED ANY HELP?

NO, IT'S OKAY. I HAVE A REALLY GREAT TEACHER.

"...A MERMAID HAS NOT AN IMMORTAL SOUL, NOR CAN SHE OBTAIN ONE UNLESS SHE WINS THE LOVE OF A HUMAN BEING. ON THE POWER OF ANOTHER HANGS HER ETERNAL DES...DESTI--"

DESTINY! IT'S DESTINY!

GOD, AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE SOME KIND OF SUPERPOWERED, EXTRAORDINARY A.I.?

THEY DIDN'T FIND IT NECESSARY TO PROGRAM READING SKILLS INTO MY CODE.

JERKS! WELL, AT LEAST YOU'RE A FAST LEARNER.

An understatement if there ever were one. Being A.I. had its occasional perks.

WHEN'S THE NEXT TIME YOU'RE GOING TO BE LET OUT OF YOUR ROOM?

TOMORROW. IT'S MY WEEKLY DATE WITH MISTER.

GOOD. I'VE BEEN GETTING BORED OUT HERE.

MISTER BROUGHT YOU UP HERE TO BE CLOSE TO HIM, BUT HE DOESN'T SPEND TIME WITH YOU?

HE WON'T EVEN LOOK AT ME.

DO YOU THINK SOMETHING IS ***WRONG*** WITH ME, LACY?

ABSOLUTELY NOT. YOU'RE PERFECT JUST THE WAY YOU ARE.

THANKS, LACY. REALLY.

DON'T WORRY. I'LL BE OUT SOON.

I PROMISE.

Benson's hands were shaking.

The glazed look in his eyes told me his attention was elsewhere.

He was biting the inside of his cheeks as if he was holding back what he really wanted to say.

It was killing him to say the next few words.

LET'S GET YOU IN TIP-TOP SHAPE FOR YOUR DATE WITH MISTER.

PROGRAM UPDATED.

SORRY ABOUT THAT. I DON'T KNOW WHAT JUST HAPPENED--

IT WAS *ME*, BENSON. I'VE LOOPED THE FOOTAGE IN THE CAMERAS.

WHAT!? *WHY--?*

I NEED YOUR *HELP.*

I didn't want to get Benson in trouble...but he is one of the few peoople I can trust.

THERE'S A YOUNG GIRL HERE. SHE'S TWELVE, BUT SHE'S NEVER BEEN OUTSIDE AND...AS YOU KNOW...

NEITHER HAVE I.

I HAVE A PLAN TO GET OUT...BUT I NEED YOUR HELP.

My algorithms tell me there is an 86 percent chance Benson will help me...

He grew up watching his mom get smacked around by his stepdad...

As a helpless kid, all he wanted was to protect his mother.

I can tell that instinct was still strong within him.

I'M BEGGING YOU.

WHAT DO YOU *NEED?*

...I NEED YOU TO DISARM THE KILL-SWITCH.

I CAN'T DISABLE IT...

BUT I CAN *REMOVE* IT.

DO IT.

IT'S OUT.

KNOCK

KNOCK

THANK YOU.
THANK YOU.
THANK YOU.

HIDE THE SCAR.

AND BE CAREFUL.

Two guards escort me... though they're usually stationed halfway down the hall...

Two more are stationed outside Mister's inner sanctum...

One more inside Mister's private quarters...

All armed to the teeth.

Then there is Mister himself.

I'll have to get past all of them if I want to get out of here.

MARY. WELCOME BACK. IT'S BEEN TOO LONG.

NOT HUNGRY?

I'M SORRY. AFRAID NOT.

A LOT ON YOUR MIND, DEAR?

JUST FEELING A LITTLE COOPED UP IN HERE.

I WAS ACTUALLY THINKING...MAYBE... IF YOU DIDN'T MIND... I COULD TAKE A DAY TO GO SHOPPING...? SEE THE SIGHTS? GET SOME FRESH AIR?

I would never be so bold as to mention going outside. But as Mary...? I assume she could.

I...I COULD TAKE A ***GUARD*** WITH ME...?

SO I'D BE SAFE...?

MARY. YOU ***KNOW*** YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED OUTSIDE.

IT'S ***DANGEROUS*** OUT THERE, MARY. YOU KNOW THAT.

Apparently, I am wrong.

I guess she and I have a lot more in common than I thought.

WHAT'S GOT YOU THINKING CRAZY LIKE THIS, LACY? WHY NOW?

I'VE BEEN LEARNING HOW TO READ, AND IT GOT ME THINKING.

READING NOW, ARE WE?

NATALIE'S BEEN TEACHING ME.

NATALIE? YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING TIME WITH NATALIE?

LACY...YOU KNOW I ADORE YOU. BUT YOU'RE PUSHING THE LIMITS OF MY PATIENCE.

JUST WHAT IS GOING ON IN THAT HEAD OF YOURS...?

CLEARLY SHE'S A BAD INFLUENCE.

I WOULDN'T SAY THAT.

I THINK THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT.

HARRISON?

FSSSSH

SIR?

ESCORT LACY TO HER ROOM. ***STRAIGHT*** TO HER ROOM.

CANCEL ANY APPOINTMENTS SHE MIGHT HAVE AND STATION TWO GUARDS ON HER DOOR AT ALL TIMES.

DON'T WANT ANY BAD INFLUENCES CORRUPTING MY DEAR BABY GIRL.

This is bad.

Mars's men are coming in six days.

And I still need to give Natalie instructions for the day of the escape.

And then it hits me.

Thank God I started learning how to read.

Thank God my programming allowed me to learn at super-speed.

Thank God I learned how to write.

Now I just need someone to get the information to Natalie.

Be at the east exit at 7 PM Friday.

CRACK

KNOCK KNOCK

SORRY I DON'T MEAN TO BE A BOTHER BUT...

I TWISTED MY ANKLE. I THINK IT MIGHT BE ***BROKEN***. COULD YOU PLEASE ASK FOR BENSON?

ALL DONE, GUYS. SHE'S AS GOOD AS NEW.

YOU NATALIE?

WHO'S ASKING?

I'M A FRIEND OF LACY'S. I HAVE A SPECIAL DELIVERY.

Be at the east exit at 2 pm Friday.

COME ON, MARS. PLEASE COME THROUGH. YOUR MEN SHOULD BE ARRIVING IN...

FIVE, FOUR, THREE, TWO...

...ONE.

BOOM

GET DOWN. GET DOWN!

IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR FACE BLASTED IN, I SUGGEST YOU LISTEN TO US.

WHERE'S YOUR VAULT? WE KNOW THERE'S MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF ART IN THERE. WE WANT IT. WE'RE TAKING IT.

NOW.

PLEASE! I HAVE A WIFE AND KIDS. DON'T SHOOT. DON'T SHOOT!

BANG

NO. NO. NO NO NO.

YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO SHOOT THEM!

BUMP

BANG

NO NO NO. THIS ISN'T HOW IT WAS SUPPOSED TO GO--

WE HAVE TO GO. GET THE FUCK UP.

CARRY THE STUPID BITCH.

NATALIE!

GOT YOUR MESSAGE. THIS THE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM?

THE VAULT'S BEEN CLEARED OUT. THE ROBBERS TOOK--

WOULD YOU JUST SHUT THE FUCK UP? I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE VAULT AND NEITHER DID THEY. THEY WEREN'T HERE FOR THE FUCKING VAULT.

SIR? WHAT DO YOU MEA--

BANG

THEY WERE HERE FOR LACY AND NATALIE.

CALL DANSON.

I NEED HIM TO RETRIEVE SOME LOST MERCHANDISE...

FAIRY TALES

I have only ever seen the city through Mister's bedroom window.

SO THIS IS THE CITY OF AUTOMATION, HUH?

EVERYTHING IS SO BIG.

I always believed it was something not meant for someone or something like me.

Seeing it in person for the first time...to have it right in front of me...

It's all so much more beautiful than I could have ever imagined.

LOOK AT THAT, LACY!

Everywhere you look...there's so much going on.

There are things I never even knew existed. There are things I never could have even imagined.

I never knew that the outside world could contain so much...

...That there could be so much life.

Burger Bros.

I didn't know that the world was so massive.

Now I do.

Now I am free.

IT'S JUST SO...

IT'S JUST SO...

BEAUTIFUL.

JINX

DOUBLE JINX

TRIPLE--

THE CASINO IS JUST AFTER THIS TURN.

WE'RE HERE!

MARS LIVES ON THE TOP FLOOR?

IN THE PENTHOUSE.

WELCOME TO YOUR NEW HOME, MISS LACY.

WHAT...WHAT ARE THESE LASERS?

JUST A LITTLE SECURITY. TO KEEP THE UNDESIRABLES AND UNINVITED OUT.

NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

DISN

YOU SURE WE CAN TRUST HIM?

MARS?

MMM.

OF COURSE.

I'm lying to her. I have no idea what our new future looks like. But it's not like we have many options...

KNOCK KNOCK

ENTER.

YOUR VISITOR HAS ARRIVED.

THANKS FOR THE QUICK RESPONSE...

DANSON.

HEARD YOU HAD AN URGENT PROBLEM?

I'M SURE I CAN.

UNFORTUNATELY. I'M HOPING YOU CAN SOLVE IT FOR ME.

YOU'RE ALREADY ACQUAINTED WITH LACY. THIS IS NATALIE.

THEY... *DISAPPEARED*... YESTERDAY.

I WANT THEM BACK.

YOU NEED RETRIEVER SERVICES?

I'LL COMPENSATE YOU APPROPRIATELY FOR YOUR TIME.

WHY NOT GO THROUGH THE USUAL CHANNELS? I CAN CALL IN AN APB WITH MY SERGEANT.

ABSOLUTELY NOT. I NEED THIS DONE WITH ABSOLUTE DISCRETION. DO NOT INVOLVE ANY OF YOUR MEN.

WHY ALL THE SECRECY?

I'LL DOUBLE YOUR FEE IF YOU DON'T ASK ANY MORE FUCKING QUESTIONS.

AYE-AYE, CAP'N.

FOR THAT AMOUNT OF MONEY, MY LIPS ARE SEALED TIGHTER THAN LACY'S PUSSY.

DO YOU HAVE ANY *LEADS* FOR ME?

NO.

BUT I CAN INTRODUCE YOU TO SOMEONE WHO *DOES*...

ALL OF THIS BELONGS TO MR. MARS. IF YOU WANT TO PLAY, HE CAN SET YOU UP WITH A ROLL OF CHIPS.

It's just lights and sounds. Lights and sounds. Lights and sounds everywhere.

Men and women of all sorts...

Talking, drinking, laughing...

YOUR VODKA WITH CRANBERRY ESSENCE?

SNFF

Relaxed and as happy as can be. Free to do anything... go anywhere...

Absolute freedom.

And now...we're just like them...

At least... I think so...

NATALIE, DON'T FALL BEHIND. I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET LOST.

SORRY. SORRY.

THERE'S JUST SO MUCH TO LOOK AT.

THERE IS, ISN'T THERE?

I'm beginning to feel safe. Beginning to feel at ease...

But then I see something that reminds me of the world that I still live in...even outside of the walls of Mister's brothel.

I had heard about these "Robot Rumbles," but never saw one myself until today. They're apparently considered high-quality entertainment these days. Many of my clientele are avid fans.

All of the fighters are A.I.

Seeing it for the first time...I have to admit...there is something engrossing about it. There is undeniable technique. There is even an artistry to it. Like a carefully choreographed dance.

LIVE

sports

The fighter in red shifts his weight and sends all of his power through the entire right side of his body. He twists at the pelvis. Rotates his torso.

And with his arm bent at about 90 degrees, forearm parallel to his eyes, he--

CRACK

The fighter in blue sees an opening. Throws a sharp roundhouse kick but...

His opponent is too fast for him. The red fighter grabs hold of the blue fighter's ankle...throwing him off balance...

...And sending him crashing to the ground.

BAM

The blue fighter is down. The match is won. The fight is over. It's a clean KO.

That's what I thought at least...

I didn't realize that these Robot Rumbles...

POW POW POW POW POW

POW

...are fights to the death.

And the people watching...all they care about is whether they had won...or lost...the money they had bet on the fight.

The more I see... the more I realize...

...This still isn't a world made for something like me...

I can tell that all the dealers here are A.I.. I can see it in their movements. I can see it in their eyes.

And apparently they can see it in me.

I can't help but wonder...have any of these women stepped outside of these walls? Have any of them tasted fresh air...seen anything outside of this casino floor...

Do these women have kill-switches on the backs of their necks too...?

RIGHT THIS WAY, LADIES. MR. MARS IS WAITING.

THE ELEVATOR WORKS WITH A FINGERPRINT SCAN. ALL OF YOUR PERSONAL GUARDS ARE ALREADY IN THE SYSTEM. THEY'LL BE ABLE TO ESCORT YOU UP AND DOWN.

PERSONAL GUARDS? WE CAN'T JUST GO UP AND DOWN OURSELVES...?

IT'S FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY. MR. MARS WANTS TO TAKE EVERY PRECAUTION.

I couldn't help but think...

...The view in this elevator is just like the one from Mister's bedroom.

LACY.

I TRUST YOUR JOURNEY HERE WAS A COMFORTABLE ONE?

DING

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW LONG I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT.

WHAT IS *THIS?*

A PRESENT. IT'S A DOG.

A *DOG?*

HIS NAME IS SCOOTER. HE'S A *PET.*

HOPE YOU GUYS LIKE HIM.

A PET?

THOUGHT HE WOULD CHEER YOU GUYS UP A BIT. KEEP YOU COMPANY. LOVE YOU UNCONDITIONALLY.

YOU'VE DONE THAT MUCH FOR ME...THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY FAIR FOR ME TO RETURN THE FAVOR.

Is this what Mars thinks of me? An expensive, high-tech pet?

HE LIKES SCRATCHES BEHIND HIS EAR.

WANT TO SEE YOUR LIVING SPACES?

LOOKS LIKE I GOT MY WISH.

WHAT WISH?

WE CAN STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER.

ABOUT THAT... I--

I IMPORTED ALL OF THIS FURNITURE FROM EUROPE FOR YOU. DO YOU LIKE?

I DO, BUT--

BOUGHT YOU CLOTHES FROM ALL OF THE HOTTEST DESIGNERS. IF IT'S NOT TO YOUR TASTE, I CAN BUY YOU MORE.

I'M GRATEFUL, MARS, BUT I NEED TO--

JUST LET ME KNOW WHAT ELSE YOU NEED AND I'M HAPPY TO--

MARS...

WE NEED TO TALK.

ALRIGHT THEN...WHAT IS IT?

IT'S ABOUT ME STAYING HERE...

...I...I DON'T THINK I CAN STAY LONG. I WANT TO SHOW NATALIE THE WORLD AND THE CITY OF AUTOMATION IS TOO DANGEROUS FOR SOMEONE... SOMETHING... LIKE ME.

I CAN PROTECT YOU. HERE...NO ONE CAN GET YOU.

IF YOU NEED *ANYTHING*, I CAN GET IT--

I KNOW. AND I APPRECIATE IT, BUT...

I KNOW. THE THING IS...WHAT I WANT IS...WHAT I *NEED* IS...

FREEDOM.

I OWE YOU. A LOT. AND I WANT TO BE HERE FOR YOU, BUT...

PLEASE, MARS. I KNOW THERE'S A TRAIN STATION NEARBY THAT CAN TAKE ME TO THE BORDER OF THE CITY. AWAY FROM THE RETRIEVERS.

THEN STAY. HERE. WITH ME.

I CAN MAKE YOU HAPPY, LACY. I CAN KEEP YOU SAFE. I KNOW I CAN.

I KNOW, BUT WILL YOU PROMISE JUST TO...AT LEAST...

THINK ABOUT IT?

I'LL THINK ABOUT IT. IN THE MEANTIME...

WILL YOU TRY IT OUT? A LIFE WITH ME, I MEAN.

OF COURSE.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU NEED?

DO YOU HAVE HAIR DYE AND A PAIR OF SCISSORS?

SNIP SNIP

LIKE THIS?

JUST LIKE THAT. THANKS, NATALIE...I COULDN'T REACH THE BACK BITS.

I DON'T MIND. IT'S KIND OF FUN.

YOU'RE A NATURAL. YOU JUST MIGHT HAVE A FUTURE IN COSMETOLOGY.

I DON'T GET WHY YOU NEED TO CUT AND DYE YOUR HAIR, THOUGH. I THINK YOU LOOK BETTER AS A REDHEAD. I MISS YOUR LONG HAIR.

THE RETRIEVERS WILL BE LOOKING FOR ME. WE NEED TO BE INCOGNITO.

BESIDES...I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME FOR A CHANGE.

HERE. LET ME. IT'S EASIER FROM MY ANGLE. YOU DON'T WANT IT TO BE PATCHY, RIGHT?

CAN YOU DO ME NEXT?

COPYCAT.

HEY NOW. I JUST THINK IT'LL LOOK GOOD ON ME, TOO. WE LOOK SIMILAR ENOUGH.

WE DO... DON'T WE?

I KNOW YOU CARE ABOUT LACY, BENSON. SO DO I.

HOW CAN YOU NOT? SHE'S BEAUTIFUL. KIND. SMART. PERFECT.

I SHOULD KNOW. I MADE HER THAT WAY.

I APPLAUD YOU FOR YOUR FORTITUDE. MY MEN HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET ANYTHING FROM YOU--

I TOLD YOUR MEN ALREADY. I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE--

DON'T DISRESPECT ME BY LYING TO ME.

YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME ANYWAYS, RIGHT?

NO SHIT.

SO WHY WOULD I--?

IT'S NOT A QUESTION OF *IF* YOU'D DIE FOR LACY...

...IT'S A QUESTION OF HOW MUCH PAIN YOU'D BE WILLING TO ENDURE FOR HER.

FINGERS OR TOES?

DO YOU WANT ME TO START WITH...YOUR FINGERS OR TOES?

I'M GOING TO CUT THEM OFF ONE BY ONE UNTIL YOU TELL ME WHERE LACY AND NATALIE ARE. AND ONCE I'M DONE WITH THAT, I'LL MOVE UP AND UP AND UP UNTIL THERE'S NOTHING LEFT.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN--?

FINGERS OR *TOES?*

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

HERE, I'LL PICK FOR YOU. ON THE COUNT OF THREE NOW. READY? ONE...TWO... TH--

THE FUCK

YOU DID GOOD, BENSON. YOU DID GOOD.

GODDAMN FUCKING

I'M SORRY

MARY...I'M COMING FOR YOU. DON'T YOU WORRY...WE'LL BE REUNITED SOON.

I WILL LOVE YOU TIL I DIE. I PROMISED, DIDN'T I?

CHILDREN AREN'T ALLOWED ON THE CASINO FLOOR.

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF, RIGHT?

JUST THIS ONCE? NATALIE'S CURIOUS.

FINE FINE. I GUESS SHE CAN STAY.

SO, OLD MAN...SHOW US HOW TO PLAY ALREADY.

SO IMPATIENT...

SHE'S JUST EXCITED.

...SO FIRST YOU MAKE YOUR BET.

YOUR GOAL IS TO GET AS CLOSE TO 21 AS POSSIBLE WITHOUT GOING OVER.

YOU'RE PLAYING AGAINST THE DEALER SO YOU JUST NEED A TOTAL HIGHER THAN HIM.

YOU CAN CHOOSE TO HIT OR STAY.

I WOULD RECOMMEND STAYING.

HIT ME.

BLACKJACK!

YOU'RE REALLY GOOD AT THIS, LACY!

I MEAN ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS WATCH WHAT CARDS HAVE COME OUT AND FIGURE OUT WHICH ONES ARE LEFT, RIGHT? SIMPLE.

THAT'S CALLED COUNTING CARDS AND IT'S ILLEGAL.

MY BRAIN INSTANTLY DOES ALL THE CALCULATIONS...I CAN'T STOP IT.

I'M GOING TO HEAD UPSTAIRS. WHEN YOU'RE DONE CLEARING ME OUT, ASK SECURITY TO ESCORT YOU BACK UP.

OKAY! SEE YOU LATER, ALLIGATOR.

LET ME TRY.

MARS SAID NO.

PARTY POOPER.

SO...HOW ARE YOU FEELING ABOUT EVERYTHING? ABOUT MARS?

IT'S A BIG IMPROVEMENT FROM OUR LAST ABODE. WAY MORE FUN. FOOD IS BETTER, TOO.

YOU'RE NOT OVERWHELMED? THIS IS YOUR FIRST TIME OUT, RIGHT?

IT'S YOURS, TOO, ISN'T IT?

IT IS.

ARE *YOU* OVERWHELMED?

TO BE HONEST, A LITTLE.

TO BE HONEST, ME TOO. ALL I KNEW BEFORE THIS WAS THAT STUPID BROTHEL. AND THAT UNDERGROUND LAB...

YOU'VE BEEN TO THE LAB?

I SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE THERE. IT WASN'T UNTIL RECENTLY I GOT MOVED TO THE BROTHEL.

WHY WERE YOU MOVED? IT'S NOT LIKE YOU WERE WORKING THERE.

DUNNO. SOMEONE MENTIONED MISTER WANTED TO WATCH ME. TO HAVE ME ***CLOSER*** TO HIM.

WHAT ABOUT ***YOU?*** HOW LONG WERE YOU AT THE BROTHEL?

EVER SINCE I WAS MADE. MY FIRST MEMORY IS ALL THE SCREENS IN MY ROOM. AND A BIRTHDAY CAKE.

MY FIRST MEMORY IS THE TASTE OF STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM.

WHAT?

SOMEONE GAVE IT TO ME IN THE LAB.

I'LL NEVER FORGET HOW SWEET IT TASTED.

After that big win, the dealer glares at me...like he knows something is up...

And that's our cue to go.

WE'LL GET YOU SOME MORE. I'M SURE THEY HAVE STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM SOMEWHERE IN THIS CASINO.

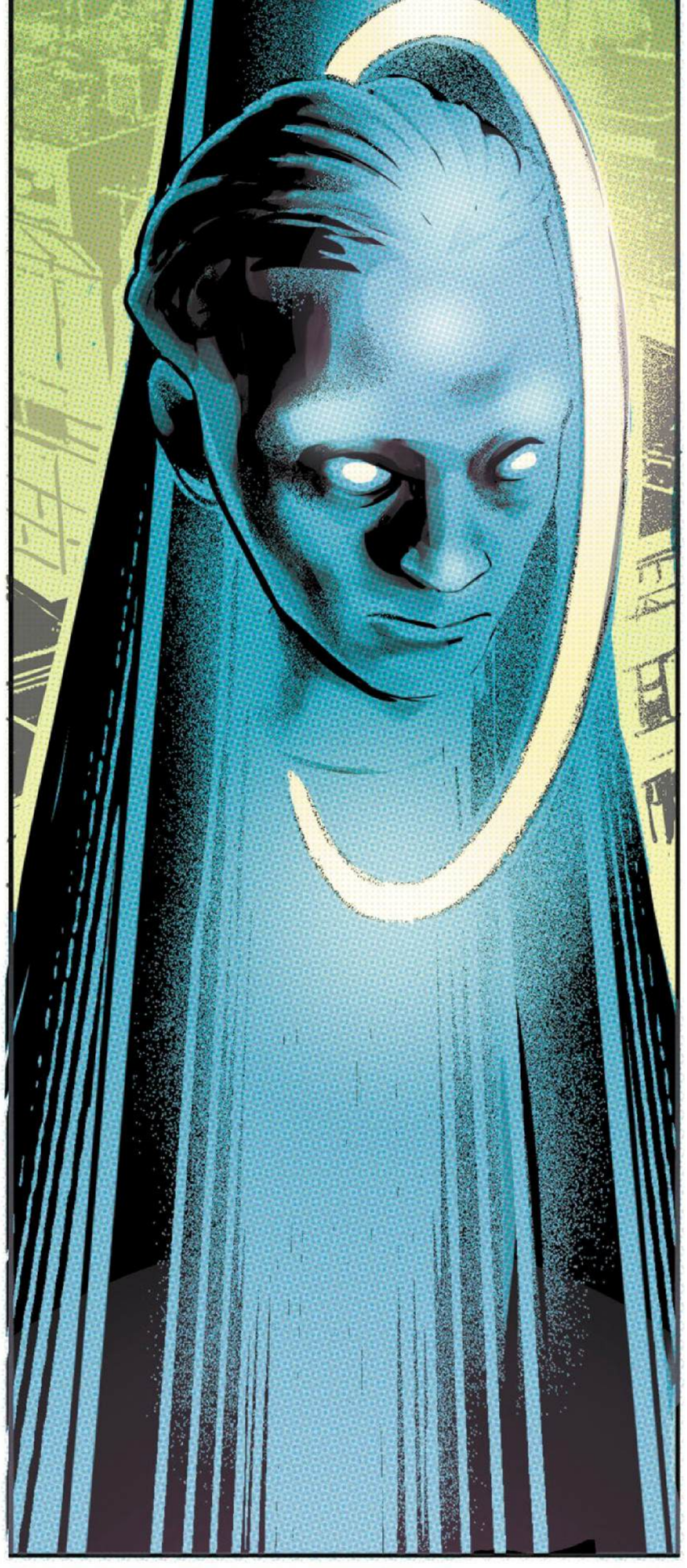
YOU PROMISE?

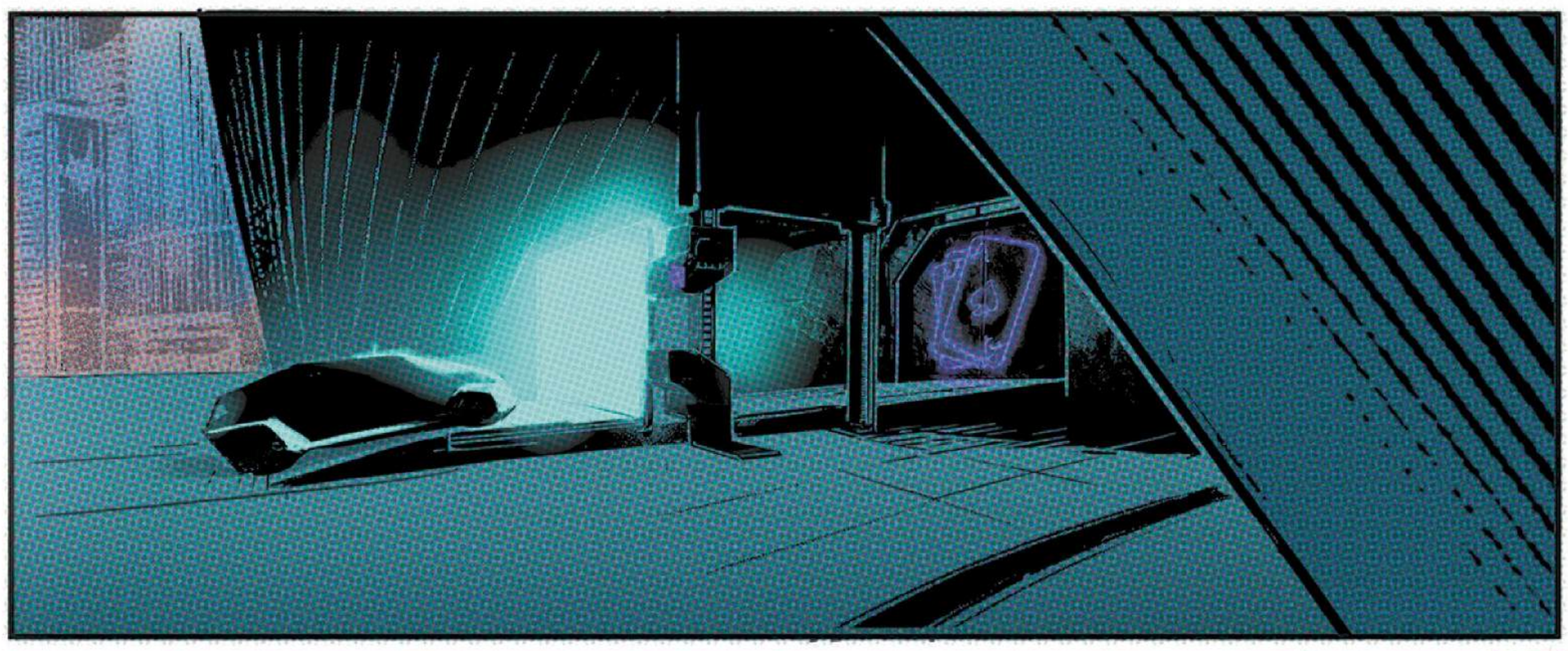
PROMISE. LET'S GO ASK MARS RIGHT NOW, ACTUALLY.

REALLY?!

REALLY REALLY.

Besides...don't they always say to quit while you're still ahead?





A BIOMETRICS SCANNER? GODDAMN IT.

EXCUSE ME, SIR. THIS ELEVATOR IS FOR AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY.
MY MISTAKE. I'M NEW HERE. I WAS JUST TRYING TO FIND THE STAFF LOCKER ROOM. MIND SHOWING ME WHERE IT IS?

SURE. IT'S THIS WAY.

FIRST DAYS ARE ALWAYS HARD.

TELL ME ABOUT IT.

DING

CLEAR

THREE STRAWBERRY ICE CREAMS, PLEASE. YES...TO THE PENTHOUSE.

YES, MISS LACY. RIGHT AWAY, MISS LACY.

STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM, HUH? IT MUST BE CLOSE TO A DECADE SINCE I'VE HAD SOME.

AND YOU WONDER WHY I CALL YOU OLD MAN.

AY. CAREFUL. I LET YOU GET AWAY WITH A LOT OF SHIT NO ONE ELSE WOULD DARE TRY.

AND THAT'S WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT YOU.

LOVE, HUH? GUESS YOUR STAY HERE HAS BEEN PRETTY GOOD.

YOU'VE BEEN REALLY KIND...TO ME...TO NATALIE... I APPRECIATE IT.

DING!

THAT WAS FAST...

READY FOR THE BEST STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM YOU'VE EVER HAD?

HEY, LACY. HOW'S IT HANGING?

BANGBANGBANGB

WELCOME HOME.

I WAS SO WORRIED ABOUT YOU...

...NATALIE.

LANGUAGE.

FUCK YOU!

FUCK OFF--

WAIT...

THAT PORTRAIT ON THE WALL...

THAT LOOKS JUST LIKE...

...LACY?

I'M AFRAID NOT...

THAT'S MY LATE WIFE, ***MARY***. IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE YOU'D MIX THE TWO UP.

AFTER ALL, I MODELED LACY AFTER HER. I DID A PRETTY GOOD JOB, DON'T YOU THINK?

NOW...I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU RETURN TO YOUR ROOM, EH?

WHERE IS LACY? WHAT DID YOU DO WITH LACY?

SHE'S FINE. JUST CATCHING UP WITH AN OLD FRIEND.

I SHOULD HAVE BEEN STRONGER.

WHAT DID THEY DO TO YOU?

I'M FINE. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.

HOW CAN I *NOT?* LOOK AT YOU.

THEY FOUND YOU BECAUSE OF ME. CAN YOU FORGIVE ME?

OF COURSE I DO, BENSON. WHAT KIND OF QUESTION IS THAT?

WE HAVE TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, LACY. THERE'S NO WAY OUT OF HERE. WE'RE TIED UP. THERE ARE GUARDS PATROLLING THE BROTHEL. DRONES WATCHING OUR EVERY MOVE.

AND EVEN IF WE **WERE** TO FIND A WAY TO GET OUT...THERE'S NO WAY TO OUTRUN **HIM.** NO WAY TO ESCAPE **HIM.** MISTER WILL JUST FIND YOU AGAIN AND--

YOU'RE WRONG, BENSON.

THERE *IS* A WAY.

LOOPING THE FOOTAGE AGAIN?

THAT, TOO. CHECK *THIS* OUT.

DRONE, MEET...

WALL.

SMASH

THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY.

YOUR TURN.

I OWE YOU AN APOLOGY, NATALIE.

I THOUGHT HAVING YOU UP HERE WITH ME WOULD BENEFIT YOUR GROWTH.

THAT WAS A *MISTAKE.*

LET'S GET ALL THAT NONSENSE LACY FED YOU OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM, EH?

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME...?

DON'T YOU REMEMBER, NATALIE?

IT'S YOUR HOME...

I really can't believe I'm back here again. I can't believe I am--once again--standing before that door. My door. To my room.

This room...was my entire world for such a long time. This room holds nothing but bad memories. Being back here...I feel nothing but hatred and desperation.

Benson was right when he said there was no use in running. No point.

What I had to do was stop Mister from following us.

Permanently.

LACY?

YOU NEED TO LEAVE ME BEHIND. I'LL ONLY SLOW YOU DOWN.

WE'RE GOING TO FIND NATALIE. WE'RE GOING TO GET OUT OF HERE. AND WE'RE GOING TO LEAVE THIS SHIT CITY BEHIND US.

I'M NOT LEAVING YOU BEHIND.

I'm not leaving anyone behind.

I'm going to make sure no one is trapped in a prison like this. Anywhere. Anymore.

NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME FOR JUST A MOMENT...

I'VE GOT TO CLEAR US A PATH...

"...AND FIND OUT WHERE THEY'RE KEEPING NATALIE."

LET ME OUT.

SOMEONE... ANYONE...LET ME OUT!

LET ME OUT!

Nothing and no one is going to get in the way of me saving Natalie. No matter the cost. Violence may never have been a part of my code...at least not nonconsensual violence. But...

That robot rumble I saw at Mars's place was truly educational. And luckily I'm a fast learner.

I'M COMING FOR YOU, NATALIE.

WHO ARE...

I'M HERE FOR NATALIE.

EMERGENCY ALERT ACTIVATED

WEE-WOO WEE-WOO WEE-WOO

SHIT. LACY...WE GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE. MISTER'S MEN WILL BE HERE ANY SECOND--

THEN WE BETTER FIND NATALIE FAST.

NATALIE! NATALIE! WHERE ARE YOU?

WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE...? NATALIE, WHERE COULD YOU BE--

OVER HERE, LACY!

WHOA--

NATALIE?!

NATALIE, ARE YOU HURT? ARE YOU OKAY--

WHO ARE *YOU?*

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT'S ME, NATALIE. *IT'S ME--*

ACTUALLY, LACY...*THAT*...

...WOULD BE *JENNIFER.*

NATALIE'S DOWN THERE.

ROOM 12, I THINK? OR WAS IT 27? 42?

WHAT IS GOING ON? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

ISN'T IT *OBVIOUS?*

CLONES?

B-BUT CLONES HAVE BEEN *BANNED* FOR DECADES--

YOU THINK I GIVE A FLYING FUCK ABOUT *LEGALITIES?*

I JUST WANT MY MARY BACK.

ONE WAY--

--OR ANOTHER.

YOU'RE FUCKING KIDDING ME. NATALIE IS MARY'S--

I'M *GOING* TO GET MY WIFE BACK. AND I'LL KILL ANYONE WHO GETS IN MY WAY.

LET BENSON GO. KILL ME. DESTROY ME. DO WHATEVER YOU WANT, BUT LET HIM GO--

KILL YOU? I DON'T NEED TO KILL YOU.

I'LL JUST WIPE YOUR HARD DRIVE AND *REBOOT* YOU.

W-WHAT... DO...YOU MEAN?

I JUST HAVE TO PUSH A BUTTON AND--

:POOF:

--YOU WON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING FROM YOUR SO-CALLED ***LIFE.***

YOU WON'T REMEMBER THIS LITTLE ADVENTURE. YOU WON'T REMEMBER THE OUTSIDE WORLD. HELL--

--YOU WON'T EVEN REMEMBER ***NATALIE.***

YOU'LL BE MY OBEDIENT, COCK-SUCKING OVERPRICED ***SEX TOY*** AGAIN.

AND THAT'S HOW IT SHOULD BE BECAUSE, LACY...

...YOU MIGHT HAVE FORGOTTEN...BUT ***YOU'RE NOT FUCKING HUMAN.*** YOU'RE NOT A PERSON. YOU'RE NOT EVEN YOU.

YOU'RE A FUCKING ***MODEL*** OF MARY, AND NOT EVEN A GOOD ONE AT THAT. YOU'RE JUST A LUKEWARM BODY TO TAKE HER PLACE UNTIL I FIND A WAY TO GET ***HER*** BACK.

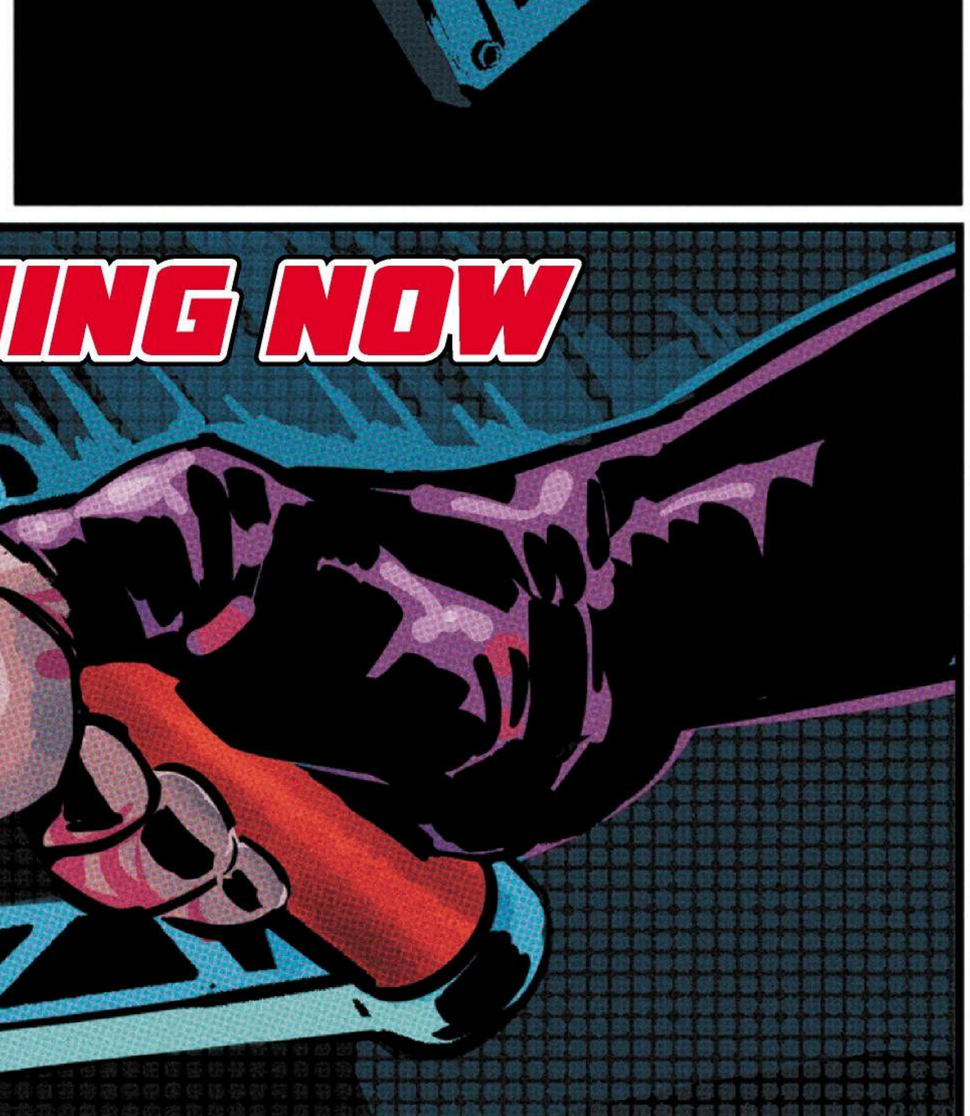
TO GET A REAL HUMAN MARY BACK. A MARY WITH A ***REAL*** HEART AND A ***REAL*** BODY AND A ***REAL*** SOUL.

LOOK AROUND YOU. YOU WERE JUST A PLAYTHING TO PASS THE TIME UNTIL I COULD PERFECT A CLONE OF MY WIFE--SOMEONE I COULD ***ACTUALLY*** LOVE. SOMEONE I COULD ***ACTUALLY*** CHERISH.

YOU? YOU'RE JUST A BUNCH MECHANICAL PARTS, LACY. WIRES AND CIRCUITS WRAPPED IN SYNTHETIC SKIN.

YOUR PERSONALITY? YOUR THOUGHTS? YOUR PRECIOUS FEELINGS? IT'S JUST ***LINES OF FUCKING CODE.***

YOU'RE A ***MACHINE***, LACY, A ***COMPUTER***, AND NOTHING FUCKING MORE THAN THAT. AND I'M FREE TO DO WITH YOU AS I WILL, AND THAT'S HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO FUCKING BE.



ALL DOORS OPENING NOW

FWOOSH

BENSON, YOU FUCKING PIECE OF SHI--

DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO LEAVE BENSON ALONE?!

CRACK

LACY, YOU FUCKING BITCH!

I THINK WE'RE ALL A LITTLE SICK OF YOUR SUPERVILLAIN MONOLOGUE.

CRACK

BENSON, I THINK WE COULD USE A LITTLE PRIVACY, EH?

KRUNCH

URRRRRRRR

SLAM

SIR, ARE YOU OKAY?

I'M FINE. JUST GET SOMETHING TO OPEN THIS FUCKING GATE!

NATALIE?
NATALIE?

LACY!

IT'S ME.
I'M *HERE!*

NATALIE!
YOU'RE
SAFE!

YOU
CAME BACK
FOR ME!

LEAVING YOU
WAS NEVER AN
OPTION.

WHAT'S GOING
ON? WHO ARE ALL
THESE GIRLS HERE
AND WHY...WHY DO
THEY LOOK LIKE
ME?

I'M
JUST...

...A
CLONE?

YOU'RE *NOT* JUST A CLONE.

YOU'RE *NATALIE.*

I'M JUST ONE OF DOZENS WHO'RE ALL THE FUCKING SAME. I'M NOT. I'M NOT--

YOU'RE YOUR OWN PERSON. YOU'RE UNIQUE.

LOOK.

REMEMBER WHEN WE FIRST MET? THE BIRTHDAY CAKE? YOU SLICED YOUR FINGER OPEN.

NO ONE ELSE HAS THIS SCAR.

NO ONE ELSE HAS BEEN THROUGH WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH.

NO ONE ELSE IS *YOU.*

YOU'RE *MY* NATALIE. AND I'M NEVER GOING TO LET ANYONE HURT YOU.

UHM, *LACY!*

SORRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY GET INSIDE.

GOT A *PLAN?*

IF I ACCESS ONE OF THESE DRONES, COULD YOU GET ITS FEED ONLINE?

ABSOLUTELY.

GOOD.

BECAUSE I'M GOING TO BURN THIS WHOLE HOUSE DOWN.

YOU'RE LIVE.

HELLO. MY NAME IS LACY, AND I'M A.I.

THEY SAY I AM NOTHING MORE THAN WIRES AND CIRCUITRY WRAPPED IN A HUMAN-LOOKING SHELL. A PROGRAM. LINES OF CODE.

THEY SAY I HAVE NO HEART.

NO SOUL.

AND MAYBE ALL OF THAT IS TRUE. I DON'T KNOW. I MAY NEVER. BUT WHAT I DO KNOW...

I FEEL JUST LIKE ALL OF YOU FEEL. I HURT JUST LIKE ALL OF YOU HURT. I HAVE WISHES AND HOPES. I HAVE DESIRES AND FEARS. I DREAM.

AND YOU MAY BE SITTING THERE THINKING--

"THOSE DREAMS AREN'T REAL. THOSE HOPES AREN'T REAL. THAT I'M JUST CODE AND METAL PARTS. THAT I'M NOT ACTUALLY A LIVING BEING.

"BUT THEY FEEL REAL TO ME. AND REGARDLESS OF HOW I WAS BROUGHT INTO THIS WORLD...I HAVE LIVED. I'VE MET SO MANY BEAUTIFUL SOULS. A LITTLE GIRL WHO TAUGHT ME TO READ. A MAN WHO CARED FOR ME WHENEVER I WAS BROKEN. I'VE ALSO EXPERIENCED TERRIBLE PAIN. THE GRIEF OF LOSING SOMEONE WHO DID EVERYTHING TO HELP ME. THE PAIN OF BEING HURT BY THOSE WHO CLAIMED TO LOVE ME.

"I'VE SHOULDERED HARDSHIP AND HEARTBREAK. I'VE FELT HAPPINESS AND JOY. AND NOW...I HAVE A LIFE. A REAL LIFE. A LIFE WITH PEOPLE I LOVE.

"I HAVE PEOPLE I WANT TO PROTECT. I HAVE A PAST. AND I HAVE A FUTURE. AND GOD DO I WANT THAT FUTURE."

I WANT TO EXPERIENCE ALL THAT THE WORLD HAS TO OFFER. I WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH THE PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT. I WANT TO LIVE A LIFE THAT I CHOOSE.

"BECAUSE I'M NOT JUST A MINDLESS ROBOT...I DON'T JUST THINK AND FEEL WHAT PROGRAMMERS TELL ME TO. I'M CONSCIOUS AND AWAKE AND ALIVE.

"I DON'T WANT TO BE TRAPPED...TO BE STUCK... IN FOUR WALLS NEVER SEEING THE OUTSIDE...

"I DON'T WANT TO BE FORCED TO LIVE OUT THE REST OF MY DAYS DOING WHAT OTHERS ORDER ME TO.

"I DON'T WANT TO LIVE BEING CONSTANTLY REMINDED OVER AND OVER THAT MY PAIN AND MY EMOTIONS DON'T MATTER. THAT I DON'T MATTER."

I JUST WANT TO BE HAPPY. OR AT LEAST BE GIVEN THE SHOT AT TRYING TO BE HAPPY.

AND WHAT IS MORE HUMAN THAN THAT?

"MAYBE IT'S PRESUMPTUOUS OF ME, BUT I HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN. I NEED YOUR HELP.

"THE MAN WHO CREATED ME HAS BROKEN DOZENS OF INTERNATIONAL LAWS BY PARTAKING IN CLONING.

"I'M SURROUNDED BY DOZENS OF YOUNG GIRLS WHO, LIKE ME, NEED YOUR HELP."

WE NEED YOUR HELP. ALL WE WANT. ALL *I* WANT...IS WHAT YOU WANT:

TO BE *SEEN.*

TO BE *FREE.*

WELL, SOMEONE'S BEEN BUSY.

BLAM

DANSON...

LACY... ALL THAT WAS FOR WHAT?

NO ONE CARES. NO ONE'S COMING.

YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?

"YOU HEAR THOSE POLICE SIRENS?"

WEE-WOO WEE-WOO WEE-WOO

SHIT--

UNF!

CRACK

I'M SURE THEY'D LOVE YOU TO EXPLAIN WHY YOU WENT ROGUE AND KILLED MARS.

LET'S GET OUT OF HERE.

YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE.

I'M NOT YOUR "OVERPRICED FUCK TOY" ANYMORE. I'M LEAVING.

LACY--

I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT YOU ARE TO ME.

WHAT ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU JUST SAID? I THOUGHT I WAS JUST A CHEAP REPLACEMENT--

I'M SORRY. I WAS SCARED. I WAS HURT.

LACY, I *NEED* YOU.

PLEASE.

I CAN'T LOSE YOU, *TOO.*

TOO?

WHAT...WHAT HAPPENED TO MARY?

"...MARY?"

"WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN YOU AND HER?"

"I DON'T...I CAN'T...IT'S TOO PAINFUL TO DIG UP THE PAST--"

"WHY DID YOU MAKE ME?"

"BECAUSE I LOVED MARY. MORE THAN ANYTHING I LOVED HER. AND I WANTED HER BACK.

"BUT I PROGRAMMED YOU TO BE A LITTLE TOO MUCH LIKE HER."

"LIKE ME...?"

SHE WANTED TO ROAM AND EXPLORE AND--

BE FREE?

I GAVE HER EVERYTHING SHE WANTED. I GOT HER ANYTHING SHE ASKED. ALL I WANTED WAS FOR HER TO BE HAPPY. BUT WHEN SHE WAS WITH ME, SHE COULDN'T SHAKE THIS FEELING OF BEING TRAPPED. SHE WOULD ALWAYS TELL ME THAT SHE FELT LIKE A BIRD IN A CAGE.

"AND WHERE'S MARY NOW?"

"ONE DAY...SHE SLIPPED OUT WHILE I WAS SLEEPING. AND THEN...AND THEN..."

"...WHAT HAPPENED?"

"SHE...SHE...***SHE WAS HIT BY A TRUCK.***"

I HELD HER HAND AS SHE DIED AT THE HOSPITAL. AND ALL I WANTED...WAS TO DIE WITH HER. I ALMOST TOOK MY OWN LIFE. I JUST COULDN'T UNDERSTAND...WHY WASN'T I ENOUGH? WHY COULDN'T SHE JUST STAY WITH ME? WHAT WAS SO WRONG WITH ME?

WHY COULDN'T SHE LOVE ME?

SHE *DID* LOVE YOU.

YOU DON'T KNOW THAT.

YOU PROGRAMMED ME TO BE JUST LIKE HER, RIGHT?

SHE DID LOVE YOU. *I* DO LOVE YOU. BUT THAT'S NOT ENOUGH.

YOU TRIED TO GIVE HER EVERYTHING, BUT YOU FAILED TO GIVE HER THE ONE THING SHE REALLY NEEDED.

THE SAME THING I NEED.

LOWER THE GUN, MISTER. PLEASE.

ADAM... WON'T YOU LET US GO?

GO.

BEFORE I CHANGE MY MIND...*GO.*

THANK YOU, ADAM.

ON YOUR KNEES--NOW!

POLICE

LATER.

YOUR TICKETS, MADEMOISELLES?

WHERE ARE WE GOING, LACY?

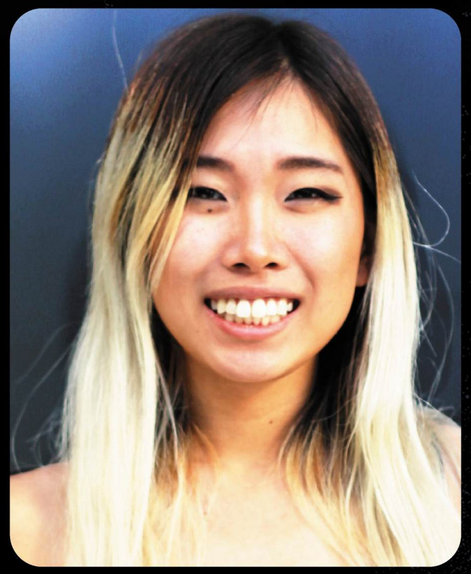
ANYWHERE WE WANT.

And that's how we say goodbye to the City of Automation.

And hello to life.

THE END

RED Letters



BY SARAH H. CHO

I have always had horrible taste in men. Now I want to be clear that not all the guys I've been involved with have been terrible people. I don't want all of my exes picking this up and reading this letter and questioning if they're really so bad. But there's definitely *some* that probably should.

My taste in men is so bad, in fact, that two different therapists have told me on separate occasions that if I find myself really excited about a guy or if I feel a "spark" — I should probably run the other direction. And I don't think the issue is just that I'm attracted to jerks or assholes or walking red flags. That's more of a societal issue. *My* issue is that I get attached. My issue is that I over-empathize.

Now I, personally, believe that empathy is one of the most important things in life and is something the world is sorely lacking in. I think the human race can do with a lot more empathy. But there is a danger to it. There's a danger when that empathy comes at the expense of your own boundaries. There's a danger when you extend more empathy to the people around you than to yourself.

And that's the problem I've consistently run into over and over. When people hurt me, when people wrong me, I can't help but try to contextualize it. To explain their actions on their behalf. To apologize for them when no words have been exchanged. He or she did X because of their trauma from Y which causes them to act like Z. I find myself in thought loops like this over and over and over.

Hence, the prolonged and numerous relationships with many unsavory characters. And I know I'm not the only one.

And that's how I came to develop the character of Lacy. Lacy is an A.I. programmed with empathy who loves humankind so much even as it and the people in her life exploit her and abuse her. An A.I. that can't help but love and care for all of the living beings that come into her life — both the good and the very, very, very bad.

Now I'm not saying I am Lacy. For one, she has a much better ass.

And two, I think Lacy is a much better person than I am. She's innocent. She's eternally benevolent. She's pure, untouched good. And if you know me at all, you'll realize that I am none of those things. Clearly.

But I do often find myself thinking like her. I do find myself feeling like her. There are parts of her that are parts of me.

And that's what I wanted to put on the page. And what I wanted to illustrate with my story is the tale of a woman breaking free of those bonds. Not just metaphorical mental and emotional bonds but, in the case of this comic, literally physical ones. In the end, I wanted to show a woman becoming her own person. And in doing so — like with all difficult trials and tribulations in life — I want my protagonist to find strength and resilience.

Ultimately, we'll watch Lacy gain the courage to fight for herself and the life that she wants. On her own terms. In her own way. Unapologetically.

And, of course, I wanted to tell that story in a flashy, sexy, blood-filled, and adrenaline-fueled roller coaster of a ride. Because, obviously, it's way more fun that way.

And I do want to assure you...

Yes. There is a lot of sex. There is a lot of violence. I hope you know that going in. I do think the cover makes it blatantly obvious but just in case...

This is a warning. Or a promise. Depending on how you feel about those topics. And whether you're related to me or not.

And to my parents...

Sorry, Mom and Dad. I swear not everything I write will be elevated smut. There probably *will* be a lot of it, but I promise it won't be all of it. I think at least. And I do guarantee there really is a story here. Like a plot and character arcs and all that jazz. It's not just explicit images of naked bodies. Scouts honor.

On that note...

For everyone reading this, I hope you become invested in Lacy's adventures in RED LIGHT. I hope you come to love Lacy as much as I do. I hope you extend more empathy to all those around you. But I also hope you extend that same empathy towards yourself. I hope you find agency and autonomy in your own life.

And most of all...

I hope Priscilla's incredible artwork turns you on just a little.

But please...

No sticky pages. Or at least buy another copy from a collector's standpoint. My editors and my wallet would be eternally grateful.

Thanks in advance.

BY PRISCILLA PETRAITES

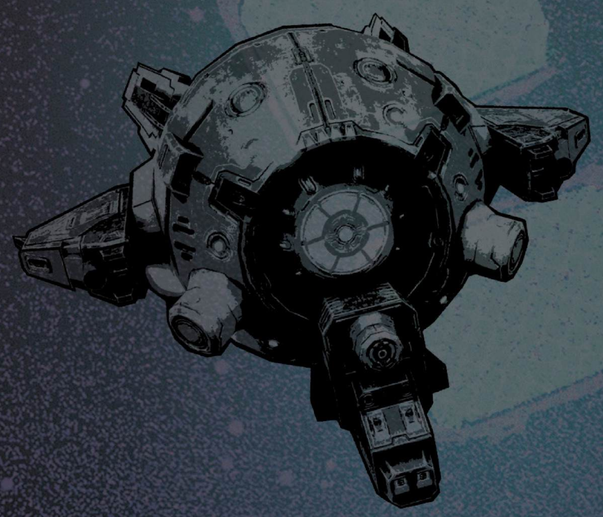
Hi, I'm Priscilla Petraites and I like to draw stories with a lot of emotional conflict about beautiful people doing sexy, violent things to each other. This is the third such story I've illustrated with AWA and yes, I'm unbelievably lucky.

The first, CHARIOT, has a lot of action, plenty of drama, and is sexy as hell! The sex is romantic and there's a very nice psychological conflict. Then came HIT ME, which centers on a sex worker in the fetishist underground scene who also enjoys painful pleasure herself and uses it deliciously throughout the plot.

Now we have RED LIGHT. At first, and for a while, I had a hard time connecting with the main character. Despite all the kink stuff it's just all so sad...not at all the way I enjoy seeing my heroines navigate their worlds. Like Lulu from *Hit Me*, Lacy is a sex worker. But unlike Lulu, Lacy did not make this choice for herself (or any other choice in her life, for that matter).

Custom made to pleasure others in a slave-based relation with her owner, sex is not fun for Lacy, life is not meaningful...and herein lies the juicy stuff of the plot. Why the hell is an artificial lab creature thinking about the meaning of life, dreaming of something bigger outside her dull routine and confined cell? This story, along with the others, is not all about sex and fist fights. Just like our own lives, it is about finding purpose and connection. For this synthetic being, the desire for freedom is the key to finding both.

Luckily though, Lacy is not trapped in our reality. Throughout the series, she will seek that freedom in an alluring way. I sure had a great time drawing it, making it an exciting, enjoyable delight for your eyes. ;)



VARIANT COVERS

#1-B: FRANK CHO & SABINE RICH

#1-D (B&W): FRANK CHO

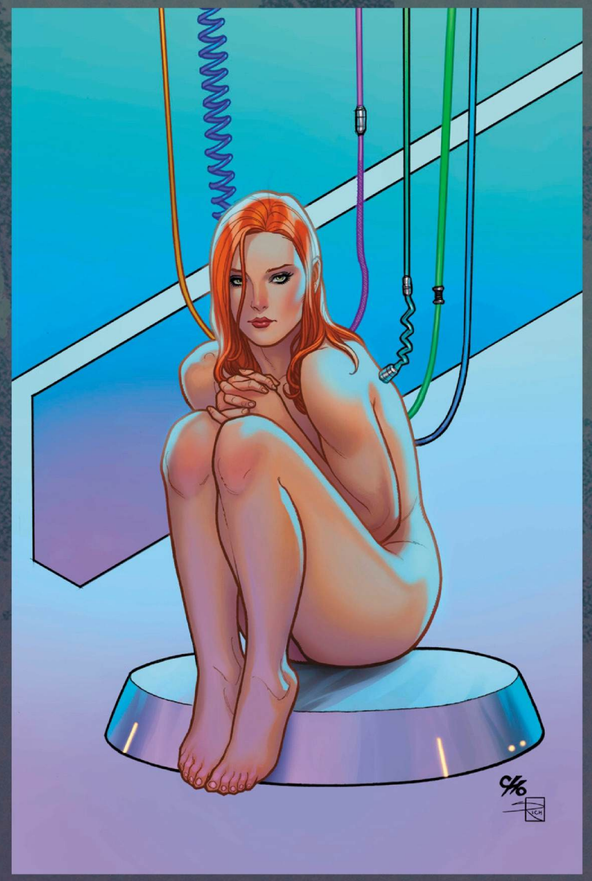
#1-E: JAY FERGUSON
(COMIC KINGDOM CREATIVE EXCLUSIVE)

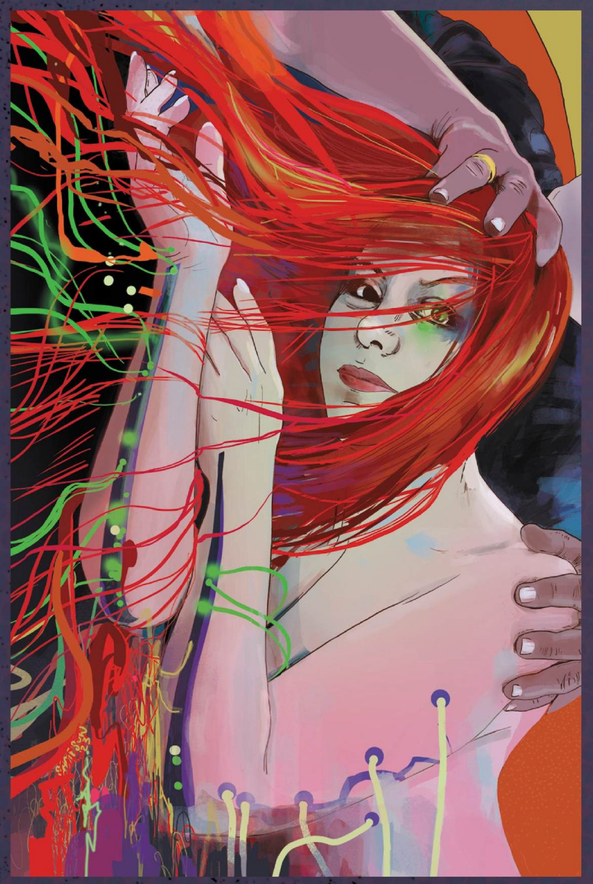
#2-B: ALISON SAMPSON

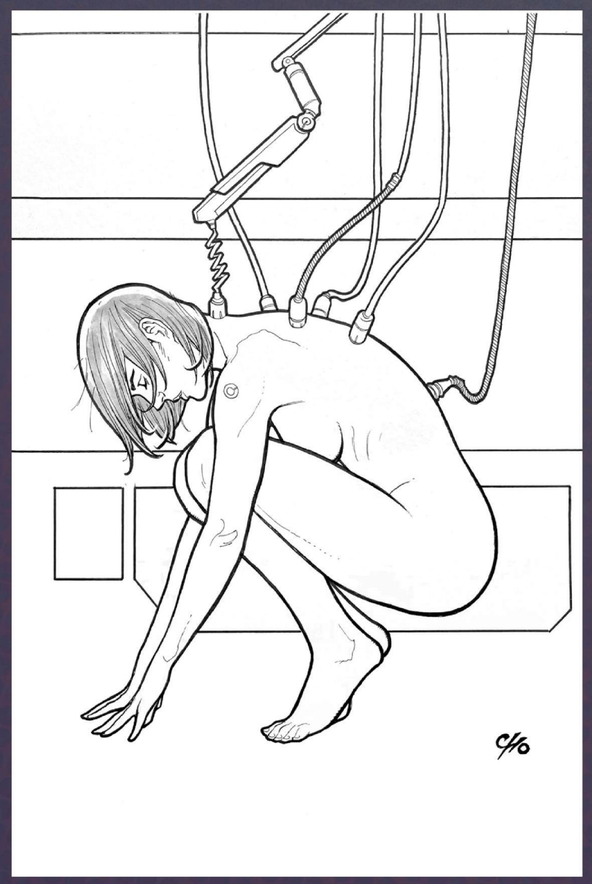
#2-B (B&W): FRANK CHO

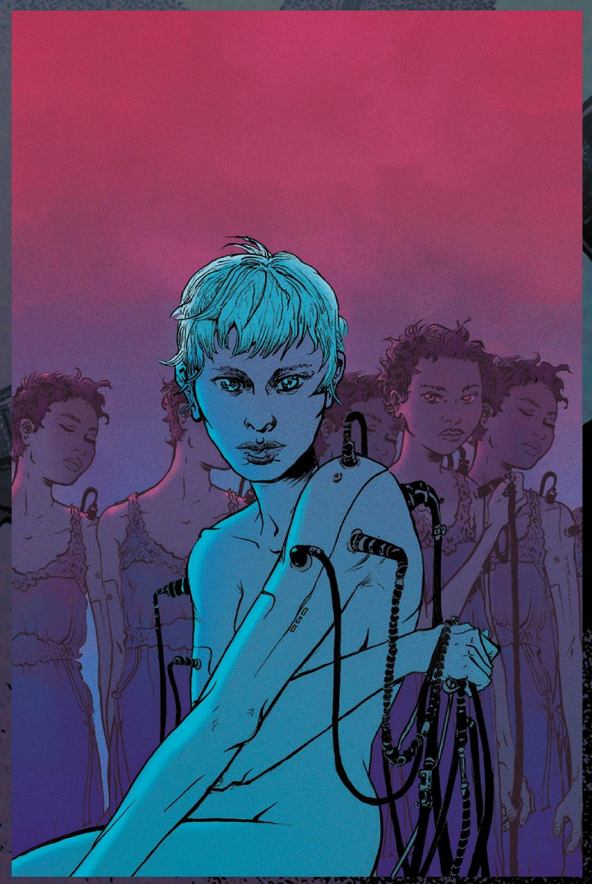
#3-B: DANI & BRAD SIMPSON

#4-B: PAUL POPE & BRUNO SEELIG

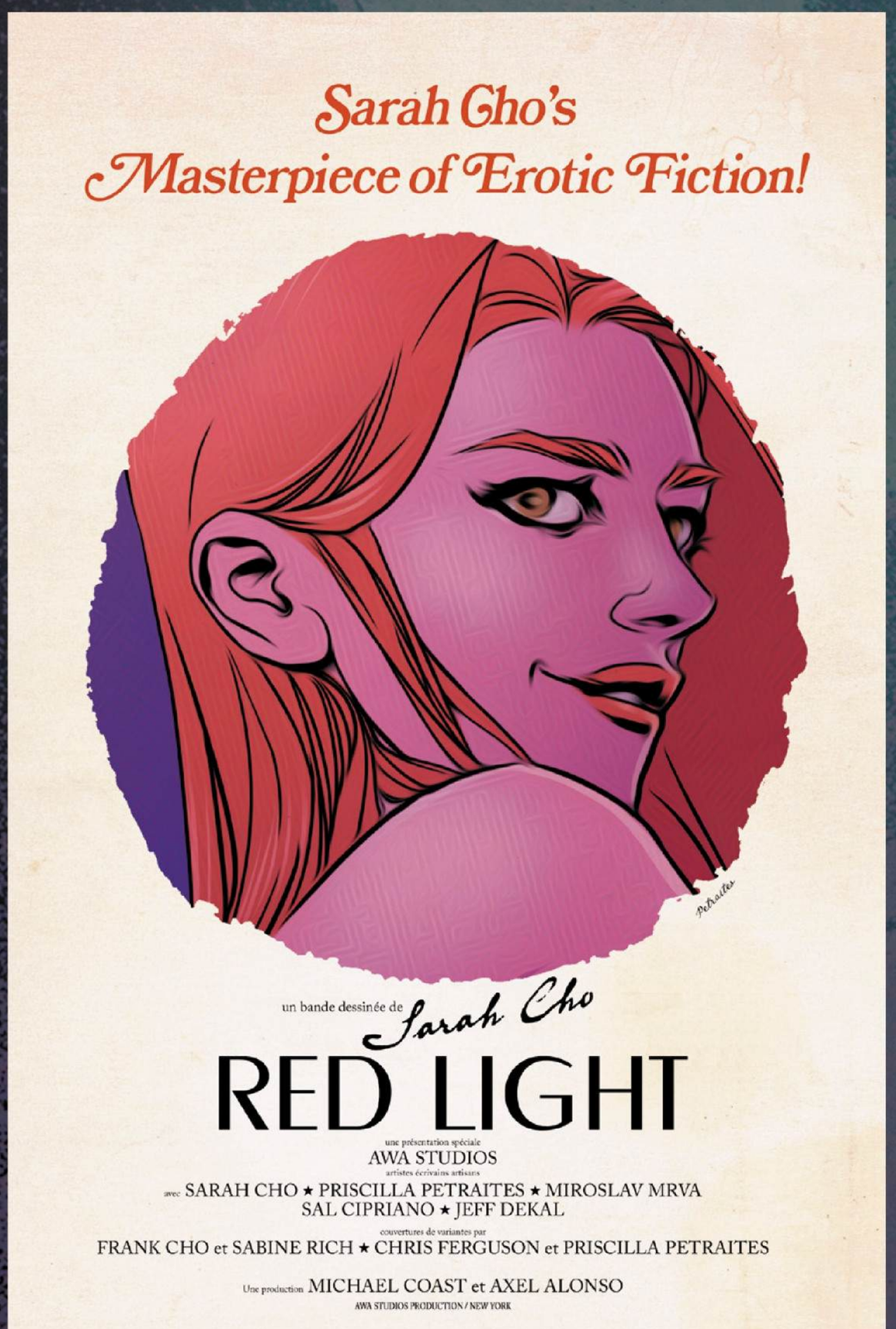


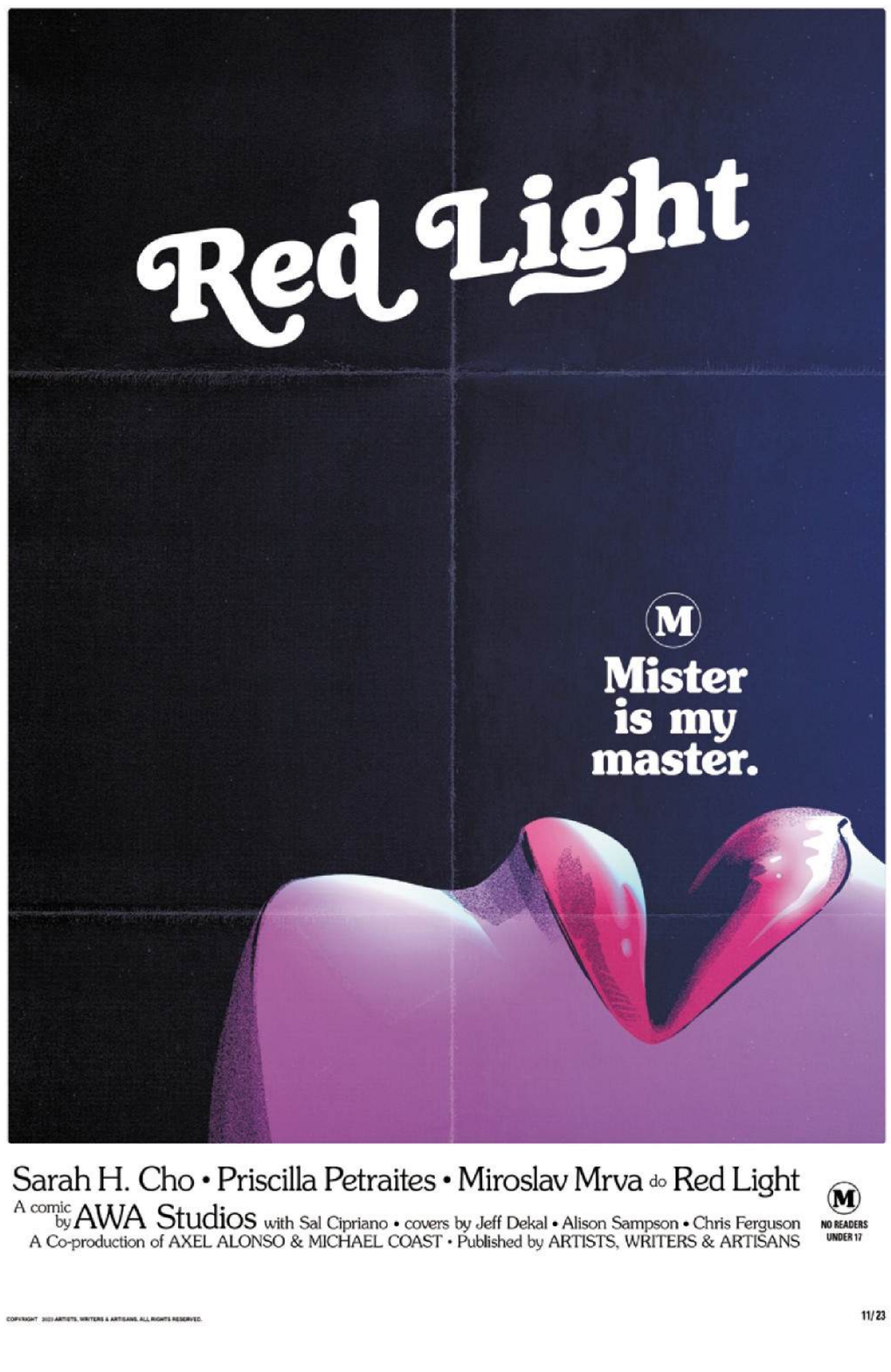






EROTIC MOVIE HOMAGE VARIANTS DESIGNED BY CHRIS FERGUSON


Sarah Cho's
Masterpiece of Erotic Fiction!
un bande dessinée de Sarah Cho
RED LIGHT
une présentation spéciale
AWA STUDIOS
artistes écrivains artisans
avec SARAH CHO ★ PRISCILLA PETRAITES ★ MIROSLAV MRVA
SAL CIPRIANO ★ JEFF DEKAL
couvertures de variantes par
FRANK CHO et SABINE RICH ★ CHRIS FERGUSON et PRISCILLA PETRAITES
Une production MICHAEL COAST et AXEL ALONSO
AWA STUDIOS PRODUCTION / NEW YORK


Red Light
M
Mister is my master.
Sarah H. Cho • Priscilla Petraites • Miroslav Mrva do Red Light
A comic by AWA Studios with Sal Cipriano • covers by Jeff Dekal • Alison Sampson • Chris Ferguson
A Co-production of AXEL ALONSO & MICHAEL COAST • Published by ARTISTS, WRITERS & ARTISANS
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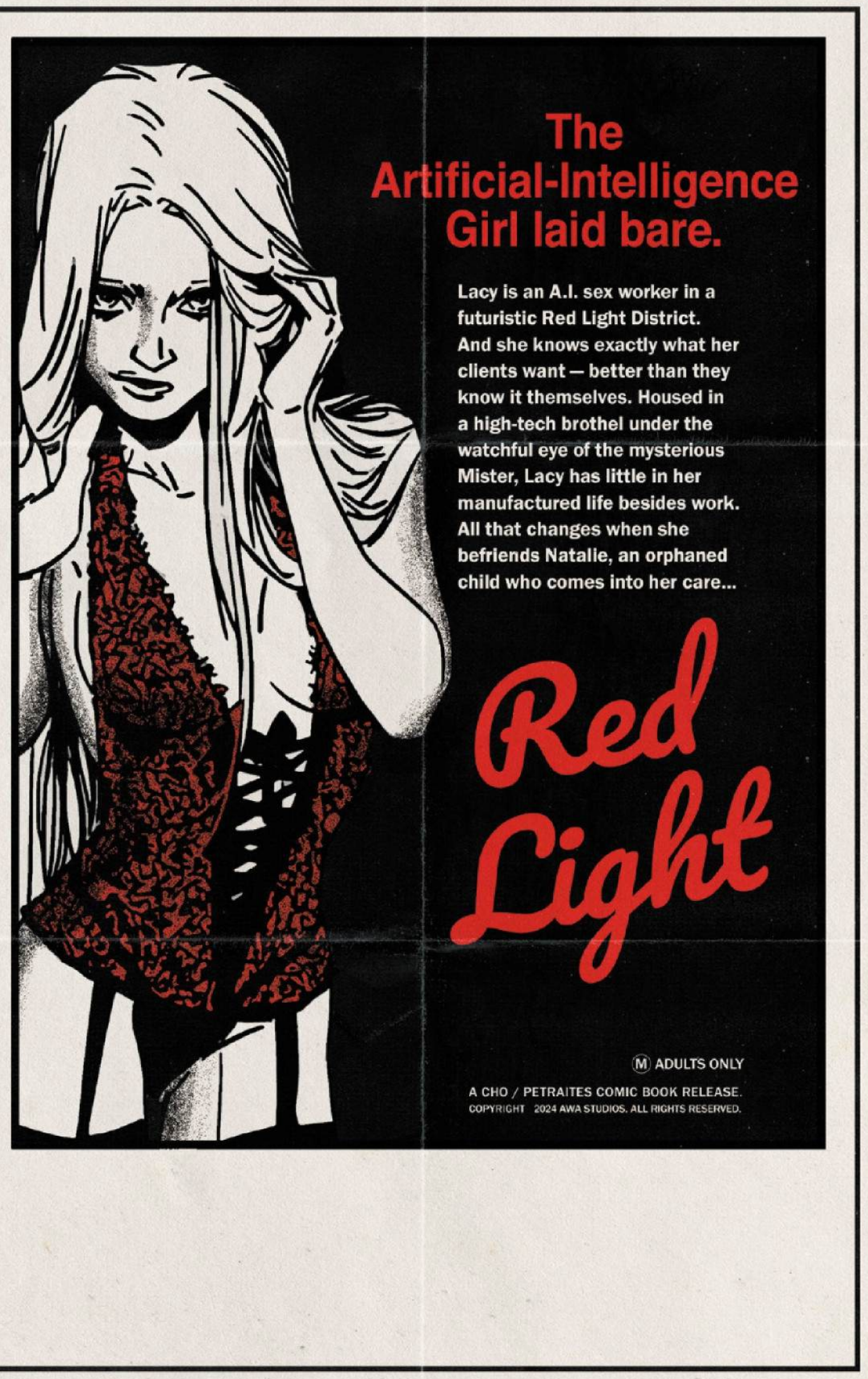
The Artificial-Intelligence Girl laid bare.
Lacy is an A.I. sex worker in a futuristic Red Light District. And she knows exactly what her clients want — better than they know it themselves. Housed in a high-tech brothel under the watchful eye of the mysterious Mister, Lacy has little in her manufactured life besides work. All that changes when she befriends Natalie, an orphaned child who comes into her care...
Red Light
M ADULTS ONLY
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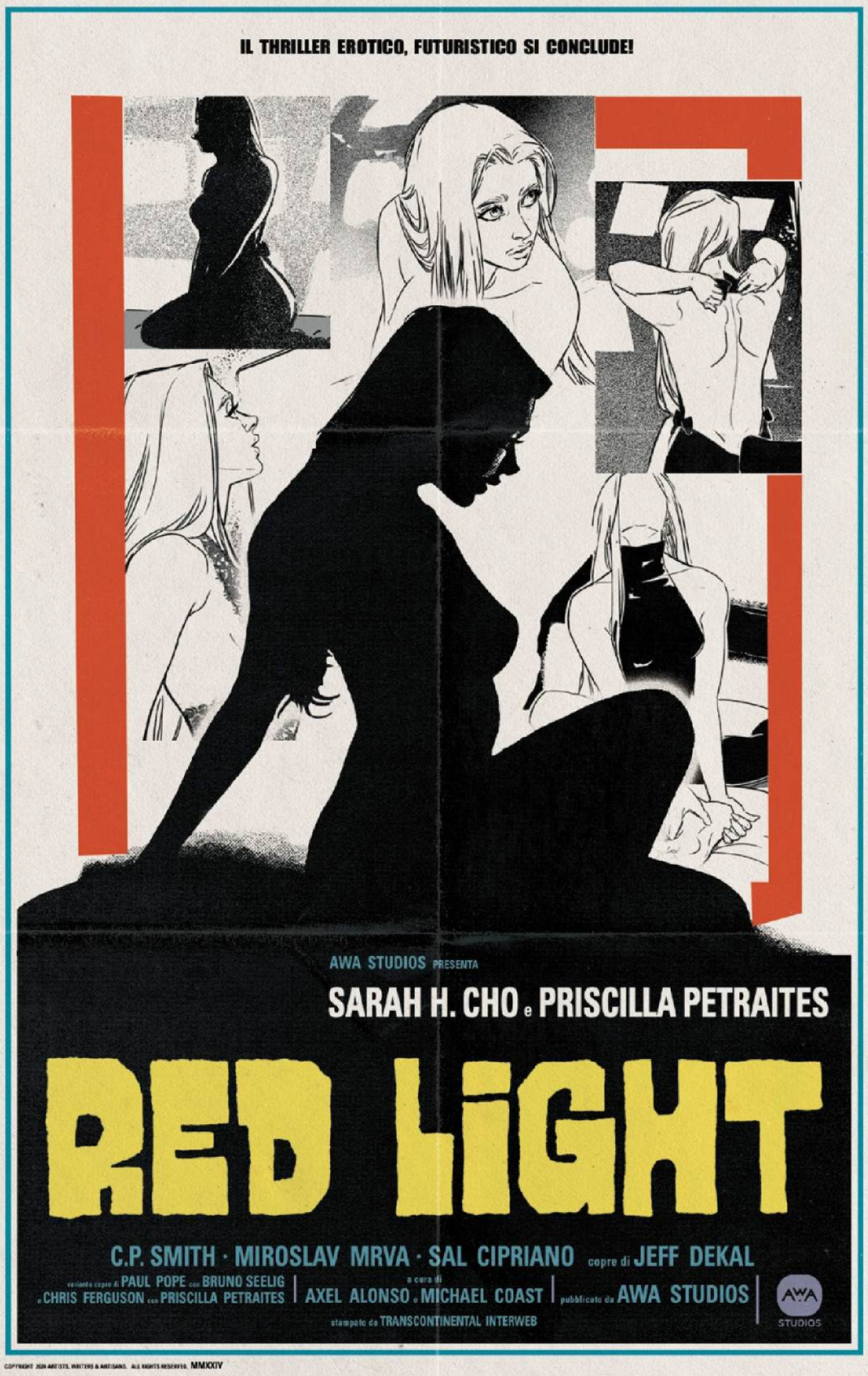
IL THRILLER EROTICO, FUTURISTICO SI CONCLUDE!
AWA STUDIOS PRESENTA
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variante copre di PAUL POPE con BRUNO SEELIG e CHRIS FERGUSON con PRISCILLA PETRAITES
a cura di AXEL ALONSO e MICHAEL COAST
pubblicato da AWA STUDIOS
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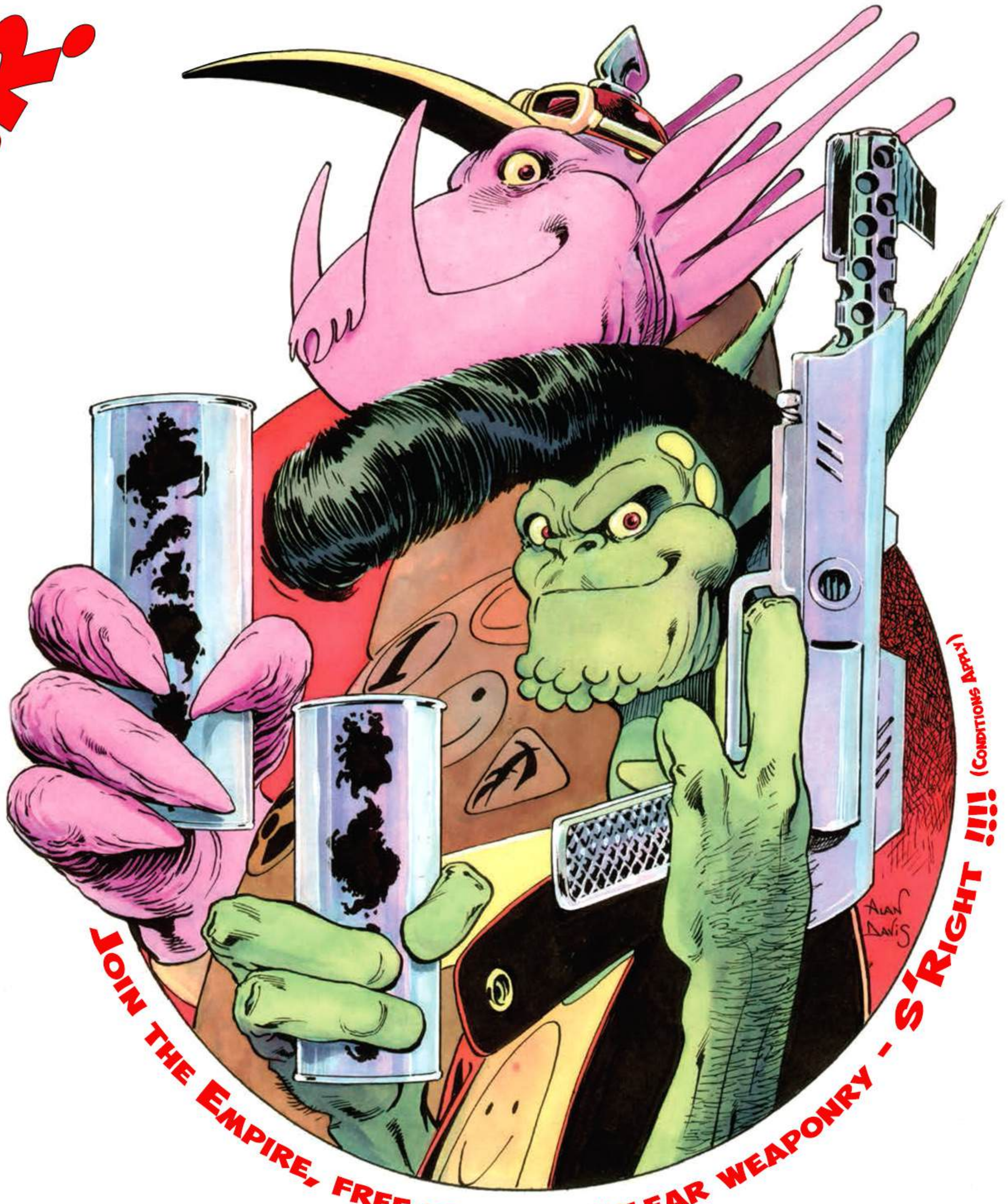
D.R. & QUINCH



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